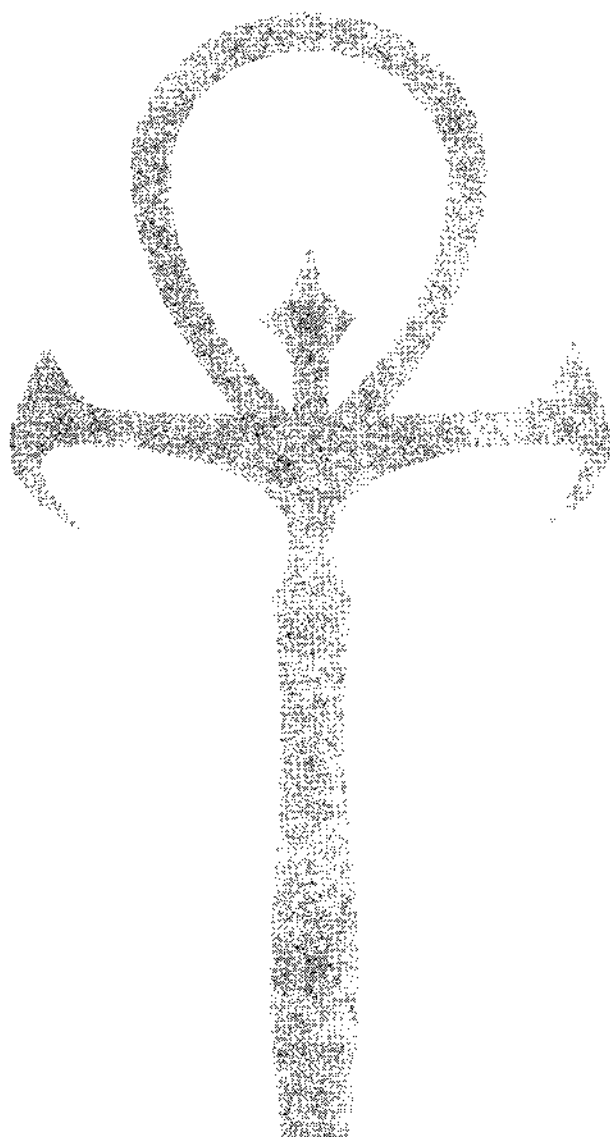


Blood Magic:
SECRETS OF THAUMATURGY™



VAMPIRE
THE MASQUERADE



Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

— Galatians 5:16-21

...The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

— Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

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The **Knucklehead** who stuffed a cardboard box into the kitchen garbage can and let the ants invade.



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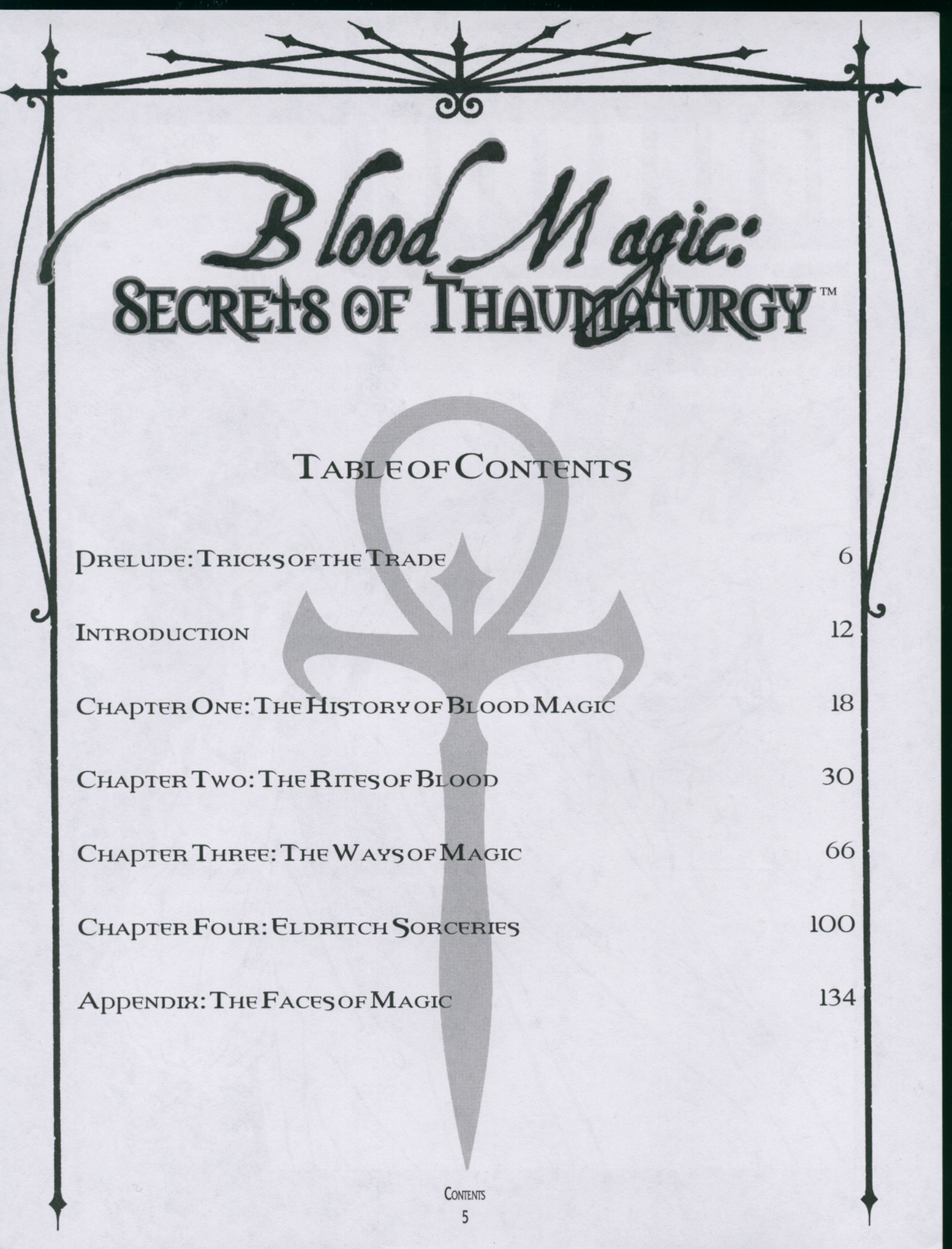
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TRICKS OF THE TRADE

It was four o'clock by the time I made it back to the chantry. Six weeks of stakeouts, shadowing the guy's car, waiting outside the theaters while he watched whatever movie took his fancy that week, and smoking under streetlights like an extra in a gangster movie. Six weeks of giving cops the heavy look and telling them, "*There's nothing to see here, officer,*" and six weeks of minor tension with some snot-nosed Ventrue who leans on the 43rd precinct.

But now it's all paid off.

I pulled off my helmet and heard that damn song Mosely always had playing. It was an awful cover of an old Smiths song, performed by some guy who used to sing with the Psychedelic Furs. Mosely thought it was hilarious at first — the song turned up in some teenage angst movie about witchcraft, and then later as the theme music for a Gen-X television show about three chesty, smiling sorceresses who lived the beautiful life in San Francisco or whatever. He played the song with a sense of irony at first, but then he grew to like it. It drove me up the damn wall.

Mosely was in the living room, as always, and I shook my hair free from the tangle it had become as I tossed the package onto the table. He was reading a messy book that had been bound between the covers of one of those old, three-ring folders.

"What's thi— no. No, it isn't. It bloody isn't." Mosely always said *bloody*. He's been dead and in Las Vegas for 20 years, but he's still got the accent

and the idioms. I guess being a vampire makes certain things stick with you. "Oh, Maxie, this is *perfect*."

The room smelled of burnt sage as Mosely unwrapped the rubber band and unwound the Kleenex. His smooth, dark hands plucked the pink-gray digit from the messy tissue wad. "Oh, yeah, daddy. Yeah. Damn, Max, I swear, I didn't think there were any legitimate prospects anywhere in Vegas."

"And that's where you're wrong, Mose, old boy. Actually, the 13th descendant of a hanged heretic was the easy part," I smiled, showing my sire a bit of fang. "The hard part was finding a real freaking Gypsy in this town. Whatcha readin'?"

"Huh? Oh, an old Daubmannus book. Brock gave it to me on loan. It's not an original, but all the text seems to be there."

"Anything useful?" I wondered aloud. Off with the jacket, off with the gloves. I was going to throw them on the chair, but that was already occupied by a big, gray toad sitting on a pile of what looked to be chickens' feet. I knew better than to mess with a toad in Mosely's sanctum.

The place was a mess, of course, so I just left the jacket on an Ottoman. Mosely was the kind of Tremere who worked in fits of inspiration and left the project "in progress" whenever something else demanded his attention. Cops would have had a heyday with the place: It had parts of murder victims in clear glass jars, an intact hu-

man skeleton, at least six grand worth of controlled substances of various types and any number of valuable books that had been reported missing from chantries as far away as Stockholm. Hell, the blue boys at the 43rd would have arrested the both of us just for the look of Mosely's ceremonial daggers. These weren't just drugs and stolen goods, though, which would have gone totally over the cops' heads. These were unique thaumaturgical manuscripts and exceedingly rare ritual components.

* * *

I opened the throttle on the Ducati and roared up next to Marshall's sedan. He looked at me, and I motioned for him to pull over. He gives me a look that suggests disbelief, but then I show him the envelope.

Never underestimate the power of an unmarked, legal-sized manila envelope. If someone shows you one, you know you're in trouble. What's inside can't be good.

Marshall followed me off the exit ramp to the parking lot of a Denny's. No one inside cared that a tall girl on an Italian bike was having words with the guy in the English suit and the sixty-thousand-dollar car. Nothing uncommon; it must happen every night about this time. Just eat your Grand Slam and nobody gets hurt.

"What's this about, then?" asked Marshall.
"This had better be important."

"That's for you to decide, Mr. Marshall," I replied.

"Well, then, what do you have there?"

"Just an envelope. I'd like to offer you a trade."

Marshall balked. "What's inside?"

"It's a secret. You can find out if you agree to trade."

"Look here, miss, I'll have you know that I'm a very important man, and my time is not idly wasted by—"

"Okay. No deal." I pulled my helmet back on and mounted the bike. The seven-fifty roared as I kicked the starter. Now Marshall decided that maybe I had a something to offer.

"—and I'm sure you understand how strange this all seems," was all I got after killing the engine again.

"Look, Mr. Marshall, the deal's simple. You want this, and you have something I want. Let's just trade and go on about our business."



"Fine. What's your price? You want cash? You want the car?"

"I'm not a thief, Mr. Marshall. I'm a collector. Come with me." I headed inside the Denny's, which had the late-night stink of drunks creeping home from the nightclubs and whores who stunk of stale sweat and old sex. "Come on, I'm not going to bite you." I pulled Marshall into the bathroom, and no one in the dining room continued to care.

"What's going on here. Is this about drugs? I don't have anythi—"

"Save it, Marshall. I don't give a damn about your money." I grabbed a handful of paper towels and wiped off the countertop. "Let me see your hand."

"What?"

"Your hand, Marshall. Let me see it. You're very busy, and your time isn't to be was—"

"My hand? What do you want with it? What's wrong with you?"

"Give me your hand." I knew it wouldn't work, but I gave it a shot. As it turns out, it *did* work. Marshall must have a self-esteem problem. He spread his hand, palm down, on the counter.

I took a pocketknife from my jeans, snapped it open, and took off his forefinger at the second knuckle. It wasn't easy — bones are remarkably sturdy. Marshall wrapped his hand in paper towels, and before he finished cursing I was out the door and back on the frontage road.

I wonder what was in the envelope.

* * *

Miranda Werner was not a pleasant woman. She had to be pushing 300 pounds, and she wore a tent of a dress streaked with rancid stains of unknown origin. She had an amiable enough personality, I suppose, but even that didn't sit well with the subhuman lifestyle she led.

Miranda's home was a trailer perched on cinder blocks, and it was as much a pigsty as it was a human dwelling. Half-eaten buckets of chicken grew commendable beards on various surfaces, spilled soft drinks had congealed into syrupy slicks, and puddles of dog piss — where's the damn dog, anyway? — had become integral parts of the couch and carpet. I was sitting on the sole cushion that hadn't been defiled by pet urine. Miranda talked more at me than to me, preoccupied as she was with the computer in front of her.

"And your maiden name is Trivetsky, correct?"

"That's right," she wheezed. Even typing tired her out. She was embroiled in an argument with someone named ^witchfyre^ in an online chatroom. "Miranda Trivetsky."

"You're a hard woman to find, Mrs. Werner."

"It's Slavic."

"Of course it is. I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask something uncomfortable of you, Mrs. Werner. Are you familiar with the *shilmulo* of the Old World?"

Miranda stopped typing and turned toward me, her massive head slowly rotating on her obese body. "He's already dead."

The silence became clumsy.

"Who is, Mrs. Werner?"

"Peter. That's why you're here isn't it? About Peter's money?"

"No, Mrs. Werner, I'm here about you."

"They said it was even. Peter was who owed them the money, and Peter... no. Now the account is settled. They said so."

"Mrs. Werner, I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about. I wanted to ask a favor of you."

"What, then?"

"I need you to vex something for me."

"I don't do that anymore. I have to go to bed." Miranda shifted her girth, as if to heave herself from the chair in which she sat.

"Please, Mrs. Werner. Just this once."

Miranda began to cry. "Will you go away and just leave me alone? You and all the *shilmulo*? Yes, I know you're dead. I'll do it, but only if you go away and tell everyone else never to bother me again." Her words fell apart in the sobs that shook her. A dog outside barked.

"Absolutely." I fished Marshall's finger out of my pocket.

She took it in stride, still crying, but largely unconcerned that she was holding a still-pink severed finger in her hand. With a few words, she handed the finger back to me. Her head fell into her hands as I left.

As I stepped down the stairs, the dog continued barking. A few lots down, someone was washing their car, and a foot-wide swath of water ran downhill before me. I was surprised to find that I couldn't cross the band of water — I had to walk through the rough flowerbed and onto the dirt road before returning to the part of the lot where I had parked my bike. And my battery was dead.

With a rolling kickstart, I got the hell out of there.

* * *

"Last step, Max. Just one more night and you'll be good to finish it up."

Mosely meant that he had one more night's worth of ritual casting before we could plant the effigy on the prince. He was all decked out and covered in blood sweat — his thin chest glistened with the stuff, which smelled sweet and salty all at once. Mosely even had blood and ashes smeared in heavy lines on his cheekbones; if I didn't know better, I might have thought he was a football player trying to keep the sun out of his eyes. Then again, how many linemen know how to invoke 16th-century Greek wards against supernaturally invisible intruders?

One more night. I had one night left before I had to sneak into the prince's haven and plant this shriveled finger somewhere among the prince's personal effects. But, in Mosely's words, "That's what Maxie does — she makes things happen." If you find a six-foot-three, hundred-and-twenty-pound dreadlocked buffalo souljah in your bedroom, you're probably going to be upset. If you find a five-eight brunette with a biker jacket and a Hollywood smile in your bedroom, you're probably going to be a bit more forgiving. Believe me, I've slept with the living and pretended to with the dead, and unless they catch you waving a handful of nightshade over a burnt picture of their mother, they all think you've sincerely been watching them and "hoping to get close."

Mosely's plan was to secretly protect the prince's haven from Obfuscated "guests" and later call the prince on the unsuspected boon. Either way, Benedic would look stupid, and better for it to be in the eyes of one Kindred and his childe than every two-bit Lick who staggered into Vegas for hooker blood or to cheat the casinos. Discretion was apparently the better part of valor among vampire society, but I still had plenty to learn about how things worked in Lost Wages, Nevada. Me, I would have said thank you and killed the guy who did it, but that's probably why I'm not prince.

Mosely drew a circle around the finger with a wax pencil and dropped two handfuls of broken glass inside the ring.

One more night.

* * *

I killed the motor and rolled quietly off the main drag. From the way these neonates and anarchs carry on, you'd think that princes were like military warlords, with strongholds full of ordinance and private armies, but I've never seen anyone so ostentatious. Maybe it was like that 600 years ago, but it doesn't work like that now. Fence yourself off with a warehouse full of guns and a legion of bodyguards, and the cops'll think you're running some kind of religious cult or drug factory.

No, Benedic's not so stupid as to draw that kind of attention to himself. He's got a nice place 30 minutes from the seedy side of the city — fenced in, patrolled by dogs and a guard at the gatehouse, but it's not like *Lifestyles of the Rich & Famous* is clamoring for a tour. When you've got as much money as the prince does, you have to spend it wisely or you'll find your name all over the society pages. Benedic's not like that. Good for him.

And good for me. I crept behind a row of hedges, performed a quick ritual to hide my footsteps from the grass, and switched my senses into high gear. I could hear two dogs, maybe three, and I saw a security car just leaving the parking lot. Perfect timing.

Hopping the low wall, I got a handful of electrified iron scrollwork. Clever prince. I dropped to the ground inside the grounds and willed blood to my burnt hands, vowing not to be so reckless next time.

I dashed across the yard and onto the patio, where I could see inside through an open set of French doors. Prince Benedic was talking to his aide, Montrose, a twisted freak of a Nosferatu. I smiled to myself — a few of us suspected Montrose was sneakin' and freakin' when the prince didn't know he was there, and Mosely's little trick would put an end to that (for the next month at least). When you're dead, it's the little stuff like that which matters.

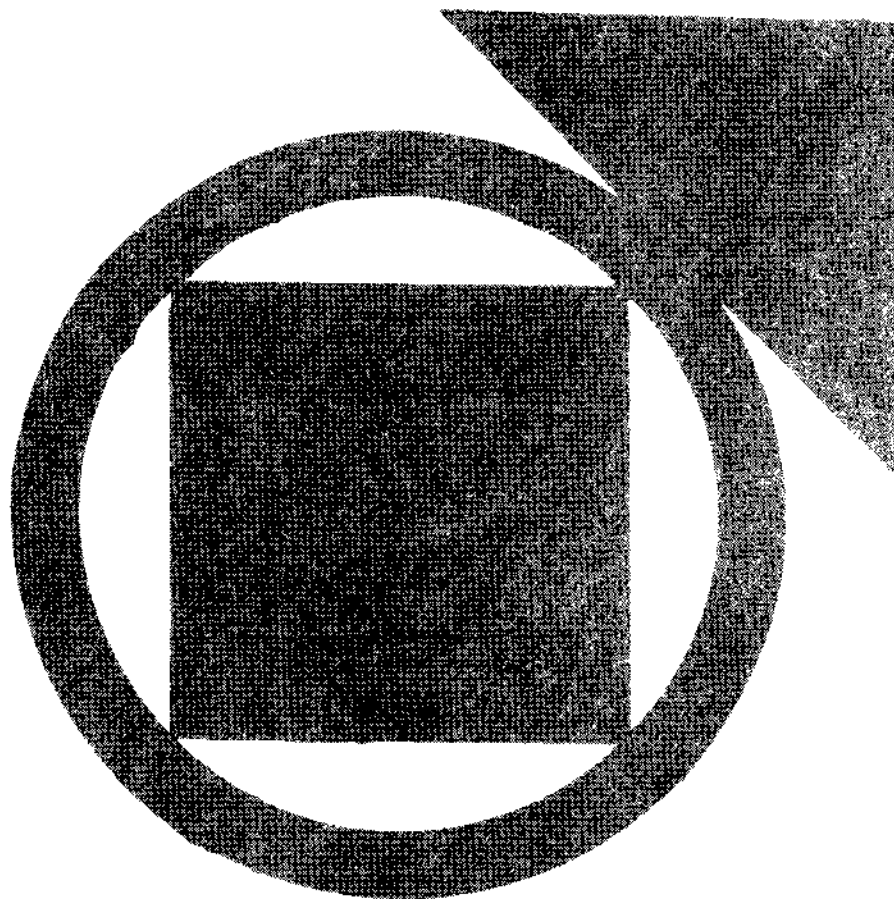
In a flash, I was up the masonry. Another brief incantation opened the lock on the window, and I was in the house. I had to do this while Benedic was actually at home, or else the security system would have pegged me. Yeah, I could've crashed it, but that's a bit suspicious. Two minutes later, and Marshall's finger was hidden among a rack of Prada suits. Three minutes later, and I was back on my bike, headed havenward.

* * *

Mosely's ruse worked. Two weeks later, one of Montrose's flunkies was found behind a statue in one of Benedic's sitting rooms. (One of Benedic's sitting rooms. Disgusting.) The prince made a big deal about it, and Mosely stepped forward, putting on a big show about how he had feared this very thing and confounded it with his own talents. Now we're in good with the prince. We're supposedly in with Montrose, too, but that's because he can't acknowledge his involvement. I can see the looks he gives Mosely, but we're the ones holding the cards — and he doesn't even know about me.

Still, it makes me nervous. Any knowledge of our magic at all would let the prince know that we had cheated, that we had made him our unwitting subject. I don't think he'd be too happy.

For the time being, though, it works. Mosely has some newfound respect among the young vampires — "Look out for Mosely, 'cause he gots ways to find you no matter where you hide!" — and some weight with Prince Benedic now. As long as we can keep our own secrets, we'll keep calling the shots. But how long can we keep our secrets?







INTRODUCTION

I'll tell you... something of the age-old horrors that even now are festering in out-of-the-way corners with a few monstrous priests to keep them alive. Some people know things about the universe that nobody ought to know, and can do things that nobody ought to be able to do.

— H.P. Lovecraft, "The Thing on the Doorstep"

This is a book about the magic vampires perform with and through vitae. Most vampiric magicians use the Discipline of Thaumaturgy in some form or another, but it wasn't the first form of blood magic, and even now it's not the only way to exploit the powers innate in vitae. The magic of the blood expresses itself many ways.

Practitioners of Thaumaturgy force their will on the world, changing the behavior of their environment to match their own desires. Living scholars, those few who know anything about undead magicians, generally assume that the magic of the blood is a watered-down version of what the still-living call "hedge magic" or "true magic" or something similar. Thaumaturgy in all its forms is a distinctive art, and while some of its effects echo those of other sorceries, its very essence depends on the vampiric condition. Without vitae there is no Thaumaturgy. It starts with blood.

The roots of blood magic run deep. As long as vampires have prowled the earth, some Kindred have sought to gain powers through the blood that they couldn't create any other way. Almost every generation of vampires active in the modern nights includes some practitioners of Thaumaturgy in various forms, and the oldest known blood magicians allude to older magicians now destroyed, inactive or disappeared. The Tremere brought organization and visibility to blood magic; they codified it, but didn't invent it.

Blood magic isn't pleasant. The thaumaturge burns through his very essence — and that of other vampires — in an effort to make the world into what he wants. This requires enough ego to feel worthy of imposing one's will on the world, enough discipline to master the intricacies of arcane formulae, and enough ruthlessness to ignore the moral costs of harvesting so much blood for personal ends. Humanity tends to

with in the face of the thaumaturge's willingness to exploit his own kind for the sake of power. Disregarding others as moral concerns makes the blood magic so much easier, after all, and it frees the magician to really explore lines of investigation without troublesome ethical concerns....

Skillful thaumaturges can visit the world with rains of fire, earthquakes, floods, lightning and other impressive displays of power. They can siphon the blood from their victims, curse them with barrenness and give them the fabled "evil eye." But not all blood magic produces such flashy results. Reshaping the world requires more than spectacle; it takes time, effort and transformations that work deep in the essence of all things. Thaumaturges spend nights, weeks, years and even decades crafting magical effects, most of which won't ever be noticed by anyone else. That's often the point: A ritual that instills a new desire or saps another's willpower *should* remain secret.

Thaumaturges do not forget that Caine could, or so the stories say, create entire Disciplines by an act of will. He could make himself and his childer into whatever a task required them to be.

Blood magic aims to recreate that state of mastery over self and the night. For the dedicated magician of the blood, true triumph consists of removing every barrier between will and result. The blood whispers its potential, and however far a student of its secrets goes down the road of insight, the whisper always lies beyond, reminding her of all that she's not.

THE FORMS OF THE POWER

Almost every thaumaturge dreams that his will may some night become the will that governs the world. In the meantime, paths to mastery come in as many varieties as the souls of thaumaturges. Blood magicians often laugh at the aspirations of other vampires, comparing Kindred without Thaumaturgy to mortals stumbling across the landscapes of a moonless night. Thaumaturgy provides a bright light. Thaumaturges making this analogy seldom stop to think that the light makes their surroundings clear, but only at the cost of destroying their ability to see what's beyond. Every system of knowledge is also a system of ignorance.

Most vampires associate Thaumaturgy ("the performance of miracles") almost exclusively with the



Tremere. The Tremere certainly brought unprecedented organization and fresh perspective to the search for mastery of the world through blood. The clan's hierarchy allows it to systematize research and teaching, producing more competent thaumaturges every century than most magical groups have had since the first nights. The clan pays a price, however, in failing to recognize the validity of some paths and the potential in others. Neither do the clan's members realize just how many other thaumaturges Kindred society includes. Early Tremere conflicts with other sorcerers built a reputation that lingers long after the clan's leaders recognized the drawbacks of intellectual poaching and gave it up. Still, the Tremere earn their reputations as masters of Thaumaturgy, by sheer force of numbers and coherence in practice.

The vanishing *Tzimisce koldun* keep their secrets to themselves. Even their own clanmates know little about what power the *koldun* draw from the spirits in the depths of Eastern European shadows. When it's necessary, the *koldun* venture forth to bring down death or malefic "justice" on their enemies, then return to their craggy havens. Few threats rouse them, but nothing works so well as hints of Tremere spies or even outsiders only dimly connected to the Warlocks. A few embittered *koldun* seek constantly for some way to deny the Tremere access to the powers in their stolen blood.

In isolated fortresses, unknown to their own clan as well as the rest of Kindred society, Assamite viziers labor as they have for centuries. They tally the blood harvested by their warrior cousins, and use it to probe the mysteries of the many worlds. They learned long ago how to command spirits and uncover the secret patterns within the world. Now, in the Final Nights, the old fortresses have other gates and the world finds unexpected strongholds, far from Alamut and the deserts, where masters of blood lore stand ready to advance their clan's interests.

Set's children pursue their own studies. Few outsiders learn just what Setites do with their distinctive sorcery; fewer still even know that it exists at all. Setites know a great deal about the harvesting and wielding of secrets in ways that don't attract attention, and enemies of the Serpents fail to grasp just how much blood makes its way through Setite nests.

Other, parallel magics have grown alongside Thaumaturgy. The coarse Giovanni art of Necromancy sprang out of variations on established thaumaturgical practices during the late Middle Ages. Over the years, various contacts and adversaries of the Giovanni have learned or stolen the Giovanni's secrets, turning the death-sorcery to their own ends. Like the Tremere, the Giovanni are considered masters of their art, but a few others wield the magic with equal or greater potency.

PLAYING THE MAGICIANS

Thaumaturgy isn't like most Disciplines: It's a framework that can support endless expansions. Further, many of its techniques can't be hastily conjured up in the heat of battle. An effective thaumaturge must be prepared to plan, for not every path is a bellicose display of fiery sorceries.

To creatures driven by whim and impulse, preparation itself seems magical. A good thaumaturge comes ready for all sorts of situations, and can unleash forces she's gathered together in advance of an emergency. It's not that Thaumaturgy provides greater power than other Disciplines, but that thinking ahead allows the thaumaturge to store up resources. Martial-minded thaumaturges compare it to making sure they have extra ammunition. With skillful selection from among a character's available techniques, a thaumaturge can create the impression of far greater reserves than she actually wields, if she can produce the right effect for the occasion on a regular basis.

Remember always that a thaumaturge often sees herself as on the way to a position of power most Kindred never dream of. She may take great pride in her achievements, and always feel driven to the next step up. Above all, she must know what she can do, and have plans on how to build on that knowledge. The world *might* be hers, if she acts just right. Let the other vampires dream of social reform, political connection, wealth and other distractions; the thaumaturge might some night rebuild the world itself so that none of those things count anymore. In the meantime, she knows she's a figure of mystery to others, and exploits that to her advantage.

MEANWHILE, BACK IN THE REAL WORLD

This book does not pretend to be a primer for occultists who would take their game into their real lives. This book is a work of fiction and a supplement to a storytelling game. If you are using this book to cast spells, you are just as big a bonehead as the person who uses it to "prove" how roleplaying games are terrible, evil things that make monsters out of nice children. Get a grip, or find something better to do with your time.

Now that that's out of the way....

SYSTEMS AND STORIES

Although this book explores the secrets of Thaumaturgy, we've made the attempt to move beyond the obvious "book of spells" concept. In fact, of this book's many words, only about half are devoted to game systems and new powers. While this no doubt puts the book into the "that sucks, I wish it had kewl powerz" column for many people, those who are looking for storytelling hooks for their chronicles shouldn't be disappointed.

Additionally, we have left much in the hands of individual Storytellers. The fiendish among Storytellers can derive no end of dramatic glee from sending their troupes' characters after hard-to-find thaumaturgical components, or by having the rites of blood magic go awry and observing how the characters deal with the situation. Thaumaturgy is much more than just a Discipline; it's a great way to add depth or sub-plots to your stories, it works perfectly when used to create the subtle "creep factor" of Things That Are Not Meant To Be, and it's even an intellectual pursuit for characters who enjoy searching after lost tombs and forgotten libraries in the manner of Lovecraftian horror stories. Make it work for you.

Also, in the interests of helping the Storyteller, we've left many of the finer details unexplained with regards to ritual and effect. Some Storytellers may prefer to get right to the action, skipping the components and preparation for blood magic rituals, while others may choose to evince horror from them. Does it make for a better story to assume the action takes precedence, or do you favor the horrific detail of

characters eating spiders and meticulously casting numerologies for their effects? The choice is yours.

LEXICON

The practice of Thaumaturgy has spawned an enormous body of specialized language. The purpose of this lexicon is to establish a common ground for those terms. Colloquially, words may acquire different meanings, however, and this list should by no means be taken as gospel.

Bokkor: A sorcerer who practices *voudoun* for purely personal gain.

Formula: The compilation of the ceremonial steps of a ritual and any ingredients required by it; an "instruction manual" for performing a specific ritual.

House: A specific sect or faction of magicians. Clan Tremere is widely accepted to have been a house of mortal magicians, and since becoming a clan is suspected of having internal houses as well. Examples include House Goratrix, House Etrius, etc. In many cases, chantries refer to themselves as houses, but these are geographic distinctions rather than philosophical. Still, the distinction is just as valid.

Ingredient: A specific item required by a formula to enact magic through a ritual; the ingredient may or may not be consumed during the ritual's performance. Sometimes known as a component.

Necromancy: A tradition of magic that deals with unwholesome death-energies and the dead. When capitalized, it refers specifically to the vampiric Discipline of the same name.

Path: A formal, codified "school" of magic that combines a progression of effects united by a common concept. A path may focus on effect (the Lure of Flames), a component (the Path of Blood) or any other ideal.

Rite: The actual ceremonial procedure used to perform non-path blood magic.

Ritual: A set of behaviors that produce a reliable effect, most similar to the fabled "spells" of wizards. A ritual often requires time to cast as well as some sort of physical component that serves to focus the blood magic on the task at hand.

Sending: The end result of a ritual's magic; the effect of a spell, particularly when baneful or focused on an individual.

Subject: The recipient of a benign, beneficial or indirectly problematic thaumaturgical effect.

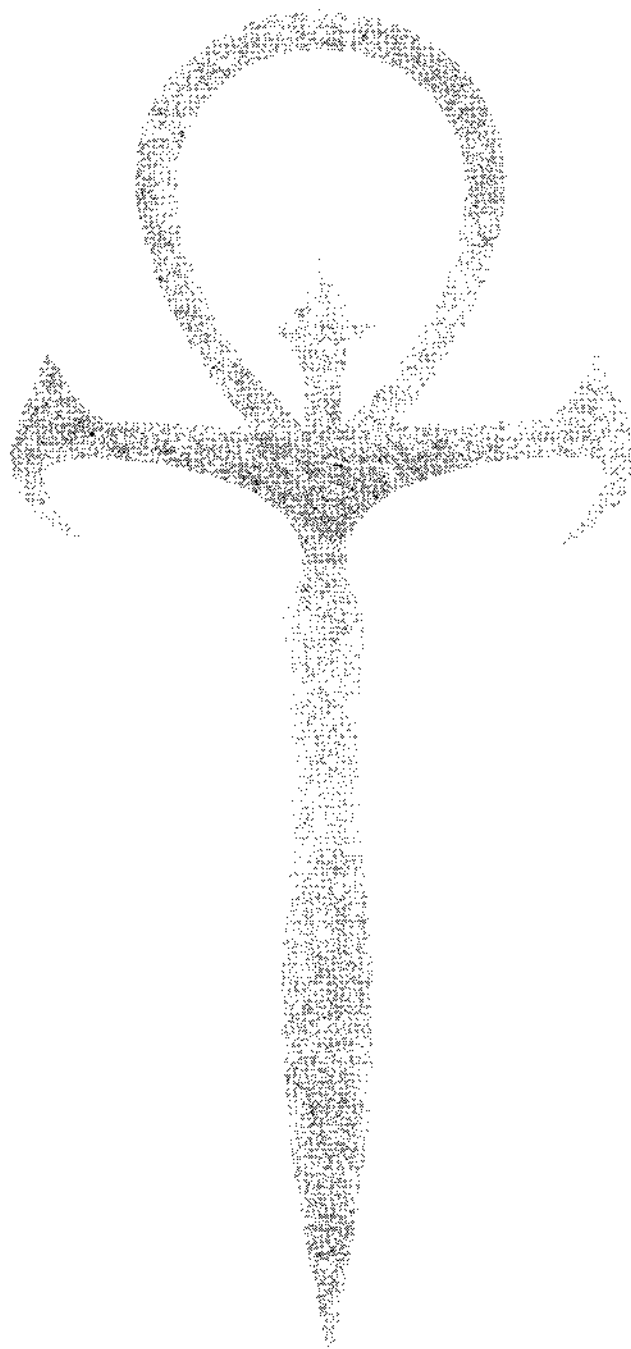
Target: The recipient of an actively hostile thaumaturgical effect, sometimes known as a victim, as well.

Thaumaturgy: Literally, "working miracles." Loosely defined, any blood magic. Also, the

unique Discipline of Clan Tremere, or any of its paths or rituals.

Tradition: A system or style of magical practices. Common examples are Hermeticism, Kabbalah and *voudoun*.

Working: A less-used variant of sending, most frequently found in reference to necromantic practice.





CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORY OF BLOOD MAGIC

"Child of ill-starred fortunes!" he exclaimed in a hollow tone, "dost thou come to pry into the secrets of futurity? Avoid me, for thy life, or, what is dearer still, thine eternal happiness! for I say unto thee... it is better that thou hadst never been born, than permitted to seal thy ruin in a spot which, in after years, shall be the witness of thy fall."

— Anonymous, "The Astrologer's Prediction"

Thaumaturges fill their havens with records; anyone who finds the opportunity to read the accumulation must prepare to spend many nights at it. As is typical with the Kindred, almost all thaumaturgical records fall into two categories: the unusable and the unreliable. The really important information either stays in the magician's own memory or it nestles beneath protective layers of cipher and symbolic language. Anything that anyone else can read very likely contains a trap, whether dangerously incomplete information, misdirection about paths of research or some other form of trouble-making clue. To obtain anything useful from a thaumaturge's records, one must know more than the first, so as to detect the traps (and in which case, why bother?) or practice code-breaking with prodigious expertise or luck.

Curious parties therefore have no way to get the whole story about the magic of the blood. Too much becomes obscured over time, sealed away by destruction or seclusion. Too much of what remains can't be trusted, in part or whole. I hope this account is true as far as it goes. That's all any chronicler can hope for.

MAGIC IN THE FIRST NIGHTS

Some thaumaturges claim Caine as the first magician of the blood. Of course, every vampire with delusions of pedigree claims Caine as the first whatever-it-is, and you can believe them or not as much as you want. The claim's not quite so ludicrous in this case, though.

The theory of Caine the Magician starts with the obviously true fact that no other Discipline approaches Thaumaturgy's scope and flexibility. It's more like the primal power of Discipline creation legend attributes to Caine than any other power in Kindred blood tonight. The theory goes on to say that Caine sought God's power to make the world *ex nihilo*, by will alone. Some force — take your pick of Satan, the True God or something else — showed Caine that the route to this power lay in the transformation of himself. Caine killed Abel willingly, *wanting* God to curse him in response.

Once gifted with unlife, he took the first step toward stripping away all barriers between his will and power.

There may be some truth to the account, or none. I myself, however, consider it absurd as a matter of personal faith. For instance, for all the rumors of awakening Antediluvians, I can find no real proof that Caine ever existed. The story could be an elaborate allegory about the potential of Thaumaturgy and its costs. Perhaps Caine was real, but this story doesn't get anywhere near his thoughts and motives. I report it here because it provides insight into how my fellow magicians think about their place in the scheme of things. We dream big dreams, bigger than the petty delusions that fill most half-blinded Kindred minds. Whether we retrace the steps of our Father, or blaze a path toward a possible consummation, we seek to make the world fully and precisely what we want it to be.

THE MAGICIANS OF THE SECOND CITY

If even a grain of truth exists in vampiric lore about the Second City, then blood magic of several kinds flourished there. Please note that nobody then practiced what we call "Thaumaturgy." The experience of forcing one's will on the world through manipulation of vitae isn't the same for all who share it, and they quickly developed different names for it. Even the term "blood magic", as general as it is, wouldn't please some practitioners. At rudest definition, any Discipline involving the use of blood might be considered "Thaumaturgy," and I'm sure you'll see the problem therein. None of the early studies, moreover, had anything like the systematic structure that various forms of blood magic use in modern times. A scrap here, a line of investigation there, everything existed only in parts. In retrospect we can see how the early sorcerers' work would converge, but that wasn't obvious to anyone then.

- **Assamites:** The childer of the Eldest Grandson included students as well as warriors, though we seldom hear about the more peaceful sorts tonight. Some pursued worldly scholarship; some studied the secrets of the blood. The clan's progenitor himself developed new techniques for interrogating the blood for insights useful in his pursuit of justice. For many of his childer as well, power took a second place to insight as a goal. They gained power in the process, because they couldn't help it; past some threshold, knowledge and power are one. Unlike others of the time, however, they focused far more on knowing the world than on changing it.

- **The Clan of Death:** Whoever existed before the Giovanni — called by turns "Ashurians" or "Cappadocians" — sought answers to the mysteries of death in many ways. Using vitae as the gateway of

examination no doubt occurred to the elder of this line, or some apt childer, early on. For some reason, however, the work foundered, and the clan turned to other paths. What might have become a foundation for Thaumaturgy, given the Cainites' reputed dependency on systems, withered in the face of the more obviously useful early Disciplines. Their small stores of lore went to other clans in trades for information the Ashurians deemed of higher priority.

- **Tzimisce:** Koldunic sorcery wouldn't take shape until much later, in another land, but even in the Second City some Tzimisce sought the power to transform the world as a natural concomitant to their power over themselves.

Naturally the scholar cannot bring himself to acknowledge the work of Sutekh or his childer my distant sire. They developed paths of their own and systematized them, while the others still dabbled in haphazard experiments. The others are simply jealous of the progress my kind made and deny our very presence within the Second City. Thus they have no explanation for the rapid development of our own Discipline anchored in the vitae-powered understanding of others' weaknesses and vulnerability.

When I embarked on chronicling the history of Thaumaturgy, moralists among my peers warned me that it was a "study soaked with blood," a "body of knowledge predicated on suffering." As it is now, so it was in the beginning. The streets of the Second City must have been filled with blood both human and Kindred, given the feeding needs of the oldest members of our race. Nowhere would the blood have been thicker than in the havens and laboratories of the first magicians of the blood. Experimentation requires many failures for each success. Knowing how much effort goes into the slightest progress I or my chantry-mates make, I can only imagine the torrents of blood and vitae, the charnel mounds of bodies that must have accumulated.

Other Kindred moralists seem to feel that such costs in and of themselves make blood magic the province of the Damned. They are fools. If they were to tally honestly the costs of simply maintaining themselves, they would face the equivalent of whole slaughter-

houses. Where their unlives bring nothing but prolonging the current state of things, mine brings the great consummation that much closer. Every bit of knowledge we gather, everything we learn about how to force our will through vitae to the essence of existence, frees us from dependence on the prison that is the world. How can I regret purposeful expenditure of otherwise useless, stagnant souls?

In time, of course, the Second City fell to fire and violence. Kindred institutions don't last, and won't until we the worthy transform the rest into creatures fit for our ends. The survivors of the city sought scapegoats. My predecessors in blood magic provided handy targets, given the very visible costs of their work and the inevitably secret nature of their results. The magicians could have shared their knowledge to persuade the others, but that would have been as foolish as unrestrained Embrace or arming the mentally defective. So the magicians suffered, and scattered.

ACROSS THE AGES

When you understand what vitae can be, it becomes fatuous to rely upon "clan" as the basis of identity. We see all vitae as pieces in a mosaic whose final form eludes us. It makes no sense to glory in the particular fragments of color or texture one possesses, rather than striving earnestly to grasp the whole. Knowledge of vitae's meaning wasn't much shared in the Second City, but at least some exchanges took place: a line of formula here for a technique of filtering there. After the city fell, even that trickle of exchange dried up. For countless centuries to come, very nearly every encounter between magicians of the blood would be hostile.

I must here write of a span of time as long as recorded human history in scarcely more space than typical puling neonates might take to list the oh-so-impressive accomplishments of his sire, and his sire's sire, and so on back into fairy tales. Remember that this work is, like the vitae that rouses you to unlife, a piece, not the whole. I write what I believe it appropriate to tell, but I could take this space again and write equally worthwhile elements of the story without once repeating myself.

*Naturally there's nothing of bias in the scholar. Certainly he wouldn't select or arrange his material to make his perspective seem empirically correct.
Of course not*

THE INNER WASTES

Caine, the stories tell us, went east of Eden. A few coteries of magicians emulated him, heading into what were then still fertile forests and plains deep in the interior of, presumably, Asia. The winds blew differently in those nights, carrying enough rain to support whole societies of which modern kine sages know nothing. The tribes that wandered those lands were primitive, and readily accepted creatures of the night as one more sort of predator in a world full of dangerous mysteries. The magicians easily moved into the role of semi-divine overseers. In just a few mortal generations, all the energy of belief that the tribes once spread among various sorts of spirits concentrated itself into propitiation of the Lords Like Men, who received as their sacrifice the gift of blood. These primitive echoes of the social order of the Second City developed new patterns of life, and held there while the outside world went on its own way.

A few of the blood magicians cooperated with each other. Most didn't. The majority understood that there's no such thing as a safe exchange of knowledge, and that power must stay in the hands of the fittest. To this insight they added the blind conviction that they were of course the fittest. In a fairly small space, rival magician-vampires developed very different paths of power. Some used blood manipulation to turn whole family lineages of mortals into mindless extensions of the magician's senses and will. Others crafted exotic creatures by fusing what we'd now call the genetic material of diverse species, together with the spiritual essence we make sure scientists fail to understand. Still others gave up their own bodies, transplanting their vitae into host organisms like the branches of an exotic flower. In at least rudimentary form, innovations in the inner fields foreshadowed many of the breakthroughs other undead sorcerers would make later.

It could only end in violence, and so it did. The less successful blood magicians resented their humiliation and sought to topple the competition, while their more successful competitors each reached to subsume all the blood resources of the area. The conflict lasted a full mortal generation, and included the sacrifice of literally every human being across a thousand-mile expanse. The only survivors were those who managed to flee beyond the summoning of their vampiric masters. Once blood that had flowed in sentient veins could no longer be had, the blood magicians began sacrificing each other and trying to transmute the mindless environment; I have seen fragments of rituals intended to leach some measure of force from sap and iron pyrite, for instance. The land died. It remains dead tonight. Modern

cultures refer to the Altai Mountains and the Tarim Basin as an example of changes caused by the end of an Ice Age. Those of us who know better merely smile, when we do not glide through the shadows in search of havens not yet lost to wind and storm.

There would not be another such gathering of blood magicians until the rise of the Tremere clan.

THE PASSING OF THE ANTEDILUVIANS

Gradually, the Kindred of the Third Generation fell into ever more frequent torpor. During this change, blood magic made its way (in small quantities) into every clan. Childer of later generations felt a sharp sense of disconnection from their legacy in the vitae, as the opportunity to speak with those who'd known Caine passed. More and more, the Kindred of those nights realized they would have to build their own frames of reference. In that environment, blood magic naturally appealed to vampires with sufficient discipline, for it promised to break down the hardening barriers of clan, lineage and the like.

Few of the new students of the blood made any effective use of their subject, it goes without saying. Most merely irritated elders and eventually slaked their thirsts. Some did manage to at least partially transcend the limits they'd inherited. From time to time in ages to come, strange circumstances in the midst of what should

have been routine Kindred affairs turned out to stem from some auto-didactic thaumaturge, one Kindred alone or a small cabal. Most often the circumstance was the not-quite-correct imitation of some other clan's Discipline. Freak displays of auroras, for instance, can stem from botched efforts to make auras visible: The magician's own aura becomes amplified and emblazoned across the sky, attracting even observers who normally know nothing of what Auspex can show. A fair number of remote towns died when an effort to produce thaumaturgical mental suggestion succeeded in granting the magician an air of authority so powerful that every mortal who encountered it died of fright immediately. Mistakes were made.

Thaumaturges usually face as much suspicion within their clan as without; they cannot afford to become enmeshed in the big affairs of social and political warfare. Instead, they operate on the small scale and through servants of many kinds. Where one finds social chaos, it's often the external manifestation of Kindred conflict. Where one finds confusion in the realm of the material, with violations of "natural law," that's the sign of blood magicians in conflict.

All of this stands quite apart from the most usual problem blood magicians face: acquiring and disposing of sufficient vessels to provide them with the blood they need. The demands of research escalate until the final



triumph in a given process. Many ancient and modern accounts of communities wiped out by "disease" cover for the truth of mass exsanguination, with or without accompanying magical manipulation of the blood's carriers. Clever thaumaturges also discovered not only how to exploit mass migrations of people, in which disappearances go unremarked, but how to spread the desire to move. We take no glory in being the secret movers of human affairs. It is nonetheless a fact that tribes from Manchuria to the Yucatan have sometimes moved because we directed them to, and that what seem the random depredations of migration were truly our handiwork.

CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

At this point, a history of more conventional Kindred activities would drag out the usual claims to fame or infamy. They don't matter to blood magicians. What have we to do with idealistic communities or the destruction thereof, or with the manipulation of this religion or that?

BLOOD IN CARTHAGE

For us, the legacy of Persia, Greece, Rome and the all the rest consists not in crumbling edifices but in accumulating scraps of lore and the gradual unification of lines of research. Although the Brujah largely place little value on blood magic, many of the elders of "my kind" still think well of the Carthaginian experiment. Such steady streams of sacrificial blood made our work easy. Oh, the blood magicians working secretly within the Brujah "Utopia" still had to labor as hard as ever to secure Kindred blood, but at least mortal blood came to them with a minimum of effort.

In that era, no Kindred harbored a real sense of Thaumaturgy as a single Discipline. What we now think of as paths of Thaumaturgy existed as separate entities. Sometimes they merged, when a blood magician realized how a set of separate techniques could be linked conceptually, but only visionaries dreamed of bringing all the paths together into one concept. That vision became more popular as a result of the Carthaginian era, when what had been more than three dozen paths of blood magic coalesced into a mere dozen. Unity then seems a viable goal.

The Brujah claim to despise Kindred societies founded in blood, though I do not find it written that they resisted the rising Carthaginian prosperity despite its dependence on sacrifice. Nor did they spurn the help of others in keeping the blood of challengers weak. They objected only when the conflicts among factions of Cainites made them feel uncomfortable. The

Malkavians and Ventrue withdrew, taking their special insights and protections with them, and not long after that their precious city fell. But the enlightened reader has no doubt learned all about fabled Carthage — and likely knows more than the most vociferous young Rabble.

BLOOD AND SPIRIT

Our kind has always dealt with spirits of various sorts. The natural companion to study of the blood is study of those beings who lack blood or vitae. Blood summons many beings who apparently yearn for more contact with physical existence, and we oblige them gladly. If they remain so bound by ignorance that they do not appreciate the virtues of leaving the world behind, then we do them a favor by binding them through command to serve ones such as ourselves, with wisdom the spirits should acquire. The rise of mystery cults among humanity made our work easier for two reasons. First, the masses became accustomed to the idea that real power might be found only in secret, and second, the bizarre trappings of initiation became well enough known that our own havens could be passed off as just more of the same.

So while some of our kind unified their paths with the unoffered assistance of the Brujah, others refined the paths of dealing with spirits. The very existence of souls without bodies raises all sorts of theological questions, which I do not propose to address at length here. I don't believe that we have nearly enough evidence to say for sure what sorts of gods or devils there really are, since I know that what we summon depends at least in part on our own expectations.

Something's out there in the interstices of the world, waiting and watching for humans and vampires capable of calling into the empty places. What it may be between calls, I cannot say. It could be that some human religion actually does provide a true account of the spirits. Perhaps it's all undifferentiated potential, given form purely and only by our wishes. God's truth, I think, lies somewhere in between, but I do not know where to strike the balance. All I know is that the practice of summoning brings forth creatures much like what we call but not necessarily identical with our expectations, and that binding gains or loses effectiveness depending on how closely we match the process to the sort of being just summoned. The rituals that bind a Christian or Jewish devil don't work so well on a Phoenician *baal* or nomad's fetish.

The expansion of trade and other contacts between societies made these conflicts of practical as well as theoretical interest. Some Kindred embroiled themselves in mortal conflicts, blessing and cursing in

exchange for payments of various sorts, and found their work with spirits becoming ever more complex. I've seen Ugaritic records left by blood magicians who decided to try changing mortal society so as to return things to a simpler condition. Their efforts at building new barriers to human movement failed, sometimes very dramatically. The plethora of demons haunting the Palestinian landscape for Jewish (and, later, Christian) holy men to banish surrounded the unmarked graves of Middle Eastern blood magicians. The fools sought to back their efforts at "social engineering" with supernatural force, only to find that the bindings of millennia past didn't always still apply.

The same sort of calamity happened all around the edges of what Mediterranean rulers liked to think of as the civilized world. Blood magicians acting as shamans, prophets or gods — as well as those independent of humanity — tried to put barriers against Greek and Roman incursion. Sometimes it even worked, with the invaders rationalizing their inability to approach as "bad terrain," or "insufficient reward for the effort," or some other plausible folly. More often something went wrong. Whatever the secrets of command through blood on the large scale may have been, they did not survive the Second City and the ancient Asian war. In the chronicles of those ages you can find plenty of popular madness, sudden religious fervor, overnight transformations of conscience, all fingerprints of our hands within their minds, through the power of the blood. But somehow little of that translated into removal of the ever-approaching threat.

History does not record how the doomed magicians met their end. Did they commit quiet suicide? Fling themselves into fruitless battle against superior numbers? Burn themselves out in final mystic displays? Their havens — at least those later seekers found — provide no clues. The records we can read chronicle rising desperation, followed by silence and blank pages.

BLOOD AND NAMES

Magic deals with the identity of things. We begin by studying the properties of our targets, what the Platonists would call its "accidents" and what a scientist would call its quantifiable features. At least, that's what we do when we can't begin by getting the subject to tell us its own True Name. Regrettably, that doesn't happen very often; many targets of our inquiries don't even know their own True Names. So we have to deduce it, breaking apart the tangled components we wish to examine and tracing out inferences. It's a slow process, with many opportunities for failure.

Once we have the True Name, the subject is ours. By changing the name, we change the ideal the name expresses. In doing so, we fight against resistance from all sides, within the organism and apparently from the universe at large, which seems to raise objections to at least some sorts of changes. We must proceed carefully, of course; nothing done through blood can be done without due caution. When we do it right, though, the universe of possibilities opens for us. We reach that much closer to the ultimate essence, setting ourselves free from the shackles of existence as we know it.

True Names sometimes change over time. Sometimes it's possible to change them, not just through the sort of deliberate effort we make but through the accumulation of actions made with other intents. The centuries-long period of tribal wandering across Eastern and Central Europe that began with the Roman Empire at its height changed the Names of the lands those peoples wandered over. War and disease spill blood from many, many veins into the waiting earth, where it seeps in and carries with it fresh hopes, new fears and above all new ideas about what the land is and means. Nowhere is this more evident than in the stunted, sickened lands of the Tzimisce, who have poisoned their own soil with their evil. The more tradition-bound magicians found their old magic not working so well. Animals, plants and people no longer responded so submissively to commands, and even the magicians' havens became gradually unfamiliar places, thanks to their connection to the changed land.

Something unknown caused the premature death of many blood magicians in those years of folk-wandering, which numerous secondary sources identify vaguely as "the Ashrad" and alternately, "the Gallû". The only old-timers to survive were those who adapted as the circumstances required, or who managed to manipulate the changes so as to create a minimum of dislocation. Their less successful rivals also tried to make the migrations into tools, stirring up battle frenzies and tampering with the landscape so as to shove migrating groups in the desired directions. It seldom worked. Yes, the slaughter spilled much blood, but a magician in such desperate circumstances makes more mistakes. At least some myths about the lands of the dead gained fresh power in the era of migrations, when the ground opened to swallow magicians who called on the wrong forces. Rivers and rains of blood marked their passing. Younger, more mentally agile competitors moved into now-vacant havens and began laying the foundations for the age of magics to come.

MAGICIANS WITH BREATH

I have little to say about those who practice magic while still alive. I wasn't one such in life myself (for the Church condemns such), nor was my sire. What they do bears very little relevance to what we do. By definition they cannot manipulate vitae with anything approaching our skill or control, because they remain bound by the blessing of life. We sometimes cross their paths — I have myself liberated several useful implements made by self-styled magi who created artifacts better than they knew, and which they'd never put to fullest use. A few times a century, one of our kind and one of theirs actually exchange information that the other can use, and sometimes the information we give them contains some truth along with the decoys.

I know that they classify themselves into all sorts of factions — Classicists of the now! — but that doesn't interest me. The only person who needs to know the details of a minor blight is the surgeon who removes it. Since I do not truck with the living magicians, merely ignore them, there's no reason for me to pay any attention to them.

The great exception to this rule of rational apathy began in that twilight period between late antiquity and early medieval times. The one sect name among magicians that we all know is "Tremere." Their much-vaunted Order of Hermes seems to have the usual accretions of imagined ancient history, and features not at all in our annals until about six centuries after the fall of the western Roman Empire. Then we find our patron Tremere and various of his brood, including the cunning Goratrix, simultaneously trading for information with the Kindred and (when they thought they could get away with it) raiding undead havens.

Blood magicians active at the time recall that many living magicians started complaining about how their rituals grew increasingly difficult, subject to some poorly understood interference. In truth, blood magic probably worked as well as ever, since blood and vitae remain what they've always been, so the Kindred of that time paid little attention to the problems of self-involved mortal witches. Tremere developed a profound envy for the mystical "gift" of Caine, eventually deciding to become one and reap the "benefits" of immortality. Rather than a gift of timelessness that could be used to further one's studies forever, the new group of Kindred found damnation instead.

THE GREAT DARKNESS

FROM MAGE TO BLOOD MAGICIAN

What is there to say about the Tremere that others have not already said? We ourselves will recount all our



great glories, all of the real triumphs and many more besides. Any Tzimisce not currently occupied in, say, torturing you to destruction will tell you all the flaws of the Tremere, encompassing the sins of Tremere and his inner circle and stretching back to their remotest mammalian ancestors. The Tremere story is no great secret in any except a few aspects, and I cannot waste the space telling you what you should already know, if you have the understanding and connections to read this manuscript.

*The scholar begins to weaken.
A suspicious soul might suspect bluster
intended to cover some shameful
ignorance. How fortunate that such a
work as this finds no readers prone to
distrust of what's given to them. One
expects no less from a hiving H arlock.*

*Sarcasm is a scalpel
not a bludgeon*

That said, there are some interesting and little-known features of the Tremere transformation worthy of discussion here, that I mention for the edification of knowledge alone. Goratrix's vigorous search for scraps of relevant lore demonstrates both the strengths and the weaknesses of the scavenger's approach. Certainly he gained a great deal of actually useful information, without which Etrius' synthesis of a vampire-creation ritual might have taken much longer to complete, or never reached completion at all. He also made a great many enemies of individuals who might have been allies. Such is what I make of the documents (again, unfortunately secondary) that I have seen.

For all our virtues, blood magicians have not yet escaped the baser impulses of the mind. We too often succumb to jealousy and rivalry, especially among the Tremere. It's not a deep secret that a careful manipulator can pit one of us against another and exploit the conflict for her own ends. I have never met Goratrix, but I doubt one who has would describe him as stupid. No doubt it would have taken longer, but I continue to wonder whether he and his assistants might have worked their way into Cainite society more gradually, less coercively, and avoided some of the repercussions we faced.

I believe that Kindred at large tend to have a very simplistic view of the war between Tzimisce and Tremere. Yes, it's true that Tremere's transformation depended on vitae extracted from Tzimisce vampires, and that this was a remarkably ill-considered choice. Elder Tzimisce probably do not look with favor on novelty, and any challenge (let alone one so direct) would have provoked them to furious response. It's quite wrong to assume that no preexisting conflicts occupied the blood magicians of Eastern Europe, nor that the war against the Tremere consisted only of two easily defined sides.

The era of folk-wandering gave way to an era of religious upheaval, with Christianity spreading from the south. Serious blood magicians know that the beliefs of living men and women offer little guidance and many potential traps, but even the best of us sometimes falters on the road to purity. Kindred became tangled in the disputes over mortal religion; if recently Embraced, they never really separated themselves from their old social matrices. Some thaumaturgical concern about the loss of paganism actually makes sense, as cultures that favor blood sacrifice likely make our work easier. The conflict spread during the same centuries Tremere and his house sought some relief from their problems. As with the blood magicians who tried to hold back Mediterranean empires, we must reconstruct much of what happened, since it left few survivors.

Not long after his Embrace, my sire toured with his own, meeting some of the old masters of blood magic. They spent time in obscure corners of Eastern Europe, where a few centuries before, dozens of our kind fought each other directly and through proxies of various sorts. I have seen his sketch of a small grove of trees in a distant Carpathian valley, each one composed of a different body part, all transformed into gnarled wood. The tree of eyes sheds a pungent sap; the tree of hands waves in even the slightest breeze with what seem like sad gestures; the tree of hearts provides neither blood nor vitae, but pulses with an irregular rhythm so that the valley echoes with a sound like drums. My sire said that these were the remains of a village composed entirely of ghouls bound to one blood-witch who went through this transformation at the hands of a rival as a warning to their domitor.

Some of the most interesting havens rendered vacant during the medieval conflicts are hard to reach now. For miles around, the land retains a particular sterility that we who know the blood learn to recognize. The final struggles of a blood magician often include a "death blow" unleashed out of the magician's fears. Sometimes it destroys assailants, sometimes it merely destroys whatever the falling magician believes the

assailants sought. Death-struck havens contain nothing except clues to the mental state of their former occupants; on rare occasions there is useful information. Generally one sees only how the fallen envisioned barrenness: a vast lake of poisonous water surrounded by jagged obsidian cliffs, a mountain where the winds whip around with unusual force and moan in ways that interfere with mortals' metabolisms, a pleasant valley in which anyone who stays too long becomes violently ill. Regimes of the Industrial Age often turned such blighted regions into waste dumps, hiding the old corruption beneath modern, rationally comprehensible garbage.

Keep in mind that these are the traces left by the wars' losers. The victors' traces take very different forms, if outsiders can see them at all. My sire located one intact haven by comparing diagrams of historical population growth to maps of the local geology and identifying a minor tributary of one of Poland's great rivers that should have had more settlement than it did. He surrounded himself with the best wards he could muster and walked toward the center of the anomaly. A sudden fit of seizures forced him to stop, or so goes his recounting. His head spasmed wildly for several minutes, vitae spewing from his nose, which dislocated itself from the force of the fit. When he recovered, he discovered that the vitae drops, which he'd thought randomly spattered, spelled out a message in one of the rougher Cyrillic languages of our kind: "Go. My home will never be home to another." Later, in the British Museum, I found in the letters of one of Peter the Great's generals a description of the same thing happening to a whole company of Russian soldiers. While he provided an excellent illustration of the blood-soaked scene, he could not read the message. Still, that region marked the end of one campaign of expansion.

The wars between blood magicians gradually tapered off, thanks in part to the efforts of the Tremere in their new laboratories. I am at a loss to find a definite cutoff point. Some conflicts came to an end when all of the participants perished. Others actually had winners. Some stopped when the combatants found something new to occupy their attention.

THAUMATURGY

I've written at several points in this chronicle that early practitioners of blood magic had no sense of an underlying unity to their arts. The Tremere changed that, and this alone makes our continued presence an asset to Kindred society. Vampires who see that, and back it up with results demonstrable to others, may yet see something else of value.

Thaumaturgy as a Discipline does not unite all forms of blood magic, of course. It is not given to usurpers to achieve the final consummation; great variations remain in the forms of blood magic practice. Thaumaturgy, as we Tremere define it, does gather in many of what had been scattered paths. It brings order to what had been chaotic, with knowable patterns of progression and a methodology for building new definitions. Thaumaturgy has no room for powers of the blood that require outside factors, either environmental (as in *koldunic* sorcery) or spiritual (as in Setite sorcery), nor for some styles of blood magic that accompany other cosmologies (as in the magic of the Assamite viziers). This still leaves a great many paths to bring together. Goratrix's scavenging proved more instrumental in the survival of our clan than perhaps even he dreamed of.

The Tremere arranged a few tense cease-fires with rival blood magicians shortly after completing the theoretical transition to undead Thaumaturgy. Blood magicians who witnessed those early demonstrations describe what a revelation it was. Suddenly many lingering mysteries made sense. No, I won't go into the details here; they belong only to the initiated, and in any event require a great deal of space to present adequately. The essence of the vision is very simple: Key techniques and concepts do in fact tie together a huge number of paths of blood magic. There isn't (yet) any shortcut toward identifying and developing new paths, but once a blood magician identifies a path, the thaumaturgical tools allow much more rapid exploitation of its possibilities. New paths multiplied, while students of old paths took them further than ever before. In those glorious nights of insight, the usual rivalries fell dormant for a time.

Typical of a European to think that only the events of his own continent matter. Most European vampires think that they brought the Embrace across the Atlantic in recent centuries. They have never bothered to pay attention to accounts of blood magic among the peoples who flourished here long before the Genoan and his ilk brought the "Old World" to us. The slack-jawed Giovanni marvelled at finding Meso-American practices so suitable for their purposes and, as nearly as I can tell, never once asked themselves whether that might mean something. When large-scale immigration began, the sects spent all their time fighting each other, and no time at all seeking for Kindred weaknesses among the races their kind so energetically displaced. I shall not relieve their ignorance here. Let them ask, and then they might learn many things worth knowing.

The scholar does not touch on that most remarkable of Tremere accomplishments, the curse upon the Tzimisces. Does he not realize just how impressive it is that a handful of upstarts, only a few centuries along the roads of the dead, would manage a feat unparalleled since the night of the vaunted Second City? A more thoughtful observer would wonder if perhaps someone gave the Tremere a helping hand, inside information as it were. But raise such questions, and face dismissal as a troublemaker. Apparently it's more comforting to believe in an absurd coterie of super-sorcerors than in any more complicated tale.

FRESH FIRES

No period of peace lasts for very long among our kind. The Tzimisce gave up their crusade against the Tremere, realizing that they no longer had the support of enough other vampires to prevail, and settled instead for playing with their own newly formed sect within Kindred politics. The blood magicians too closely tied to some specific flavor of paganism perished along with the other believers in the old gods, or went into hiding so deep that they mattered no more than they would if destroyed. Some practitioners of the new Discipline sought places for themselves within clan organizations — some disappeared, others perished, very few found acceptance. These resolutions created a void within the souls of those of us who seek the essence of things; inevitably we found replacements.

Thaumaturgical insights kindled fresh disputes: competition to be the first to use them against one's rival, hoarding of secrets that might fuel the development of fresh paths or rituals, all the usual grudges. Blood magicians particularly impressed with the Tremere sought to compete with "the usurpers" for influence among mortals, putting aside the quest to understand the Cainite condition in favor of tawdry rewards like political or economic gain. More enlightened seekers

can scarcely contain their disgust at the spectacle, but the fact remains that many blood magicians now prefer to lord over and influence mortal leaders, rather than remaining on the longer road to real, ultimate power. The betrayers of blood's promise hold no more space in this chronicle than I absolutely must give them; you can read of their deeds in annals of larger Kindred society and the front pages of the newspapers, along with the other fools.

THE INQUISITION AND THE SECTS

For our kind, the Inquisition appeared as one more nuisance among many. Blood magic *always* attracts some opposition among mortals who think of themselves as something more than what they are, fodder for our experiments. Successful practitioners of our arts learn how to hide, or they perish. The subtle witch may continue her hexes, while the obvious witch feeds the Inquisition's fires. While other vampires panicked, we simply pursued our customary courses.

The Camarilla and Sabbat posed more of a problem. I have no interest in the issues that stir the rapines of the Black Hand, nor in their pathetic efforts to construct a history and theology without the insights that can come only from our studies. Both, however, seek dominion over all Kindred, and therefore they thrust themselves upon us, demanding that we respond to them in the narrow categories they think encompass all of vampiric reality. They don't take "no" as an answer, nor do they listen to even the most patient, simplified explanation of how much they don't know. I do not respect those of my kind who make outward profession of loyalty to one sect or the other, but insofar as it gives them a bit of space within which to continue their studies, I can understand it. Obviously, I lend my talents and support to the Camarilla, but only out of support for its purpose. Jingoism is the refuge of the simple.

The only viable alternative to the omnipresence of sects is to retreat into the sort of silence that they attribute to the "Inconnu," whatever that label may refer to. Courage is essential to the blood magician, and might inspire resistance, were it not that judgment is also essential, and inspires a more realistic appraisal of the odds.

The rise of the sects did more damage to the cause of blood magic mastery than any crisis since the fall of the Second City. The would-be lords of vampires forced our kind into channels of activity comprehensible to the new rulers, and wanted all of us to advance their agendas. So many promising lines of inquiry trickled out or simply fell fallow altogether for want of investigators.

The great gain of Thaumaturgy scarcely makes up for the inconveniences that persist to this very night.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

This is a strange time.

With every passing year, our kind makes unprecedented breakthroughs along our respective paths of blood magic. We learn so much that it's hard to believe that we do it all ourselves. Do outside forces manipulate us for their own unknowable ends? Pride makes it difficult to even consider the possibility. If outside forces do operate within us — and surely they do — at least they move us along the roads we're already on. But that thought in turn raises the question as to whether those roads are themselves the best to travel toward the primal essence.

Truth exists in blood magic. It is not all a lie, like the fables we construct to tell mortals. Perhaps some of us have sown lies with the truths; I am not so foolish as to expect to find no manipulation at all. It still seems more likely to me that if we are being manipulated, that our manipulators seek to use our truths, not simply our errors.

*Desperation is sweet.
And so useful.*

At the same time we march ahead, old triumphs fail. The curse on the Assamites seems to have collapsed overnight, without warning, and frantic Tremere efforts to resurrect it all fail. Ancient wards crumble,

releasing strange creations into the world. Sealed havens open, and open havens close, sometimes trapping their creators inside suddenly intensified barriers that no available skill can penetrate. The world turns upside down and inside out nightly. Even the familiar night sky no longer welcomes us, as that damnably mysterious red star complicates thaumaturgical analysis of lines of power in the heavens.

The ludicrous Gargoyles gather to demand rights, as though mounds of vitae and gravel were fit for anything but service to their superiors. "Rights" refer to nothing in existence as we see it through the blood. The creator bears no responsibility to her creation; the creation owes everything to his creator. I like to think that more experienced blood magicians would not have lost control of the Gargoyles so easily. Some of the rhetoric of the "Free Gargoyles" spout makes me wonder. Perhaps more clueful Tremere have urged their broken toys into claims that the Camarilla cannot honor, and that must lead to conflict in which the Gargoyles must fall. That would be a worthy achievement.

SUMMATION

Past events matter only insofar as you put them to use. What matters is the present, and the future. Does this knowledge help you toward mastery? Then retain it. If it doesn't, discard it, and learn something else instead. I have done my part.

*Father Terrell Harding, Magus Dominus of St. Moses the Black Chantry
aka Ronnie Royce, Clan Brujah
aka Brother Demetrius Vance,
Malkavian antitribu*



CHAPTER TWO: THE RITES OF BLOOD

The collection of pages you are holding details the secrets behind the true power of Clan Tremere — the secrets of Thaumaturgy and blood magic. I spent over a decade in service as an apprentice before finally escaping the stagnant, oppressive system that permeates the clan and Camarilla as a whole. Since then, I've plied my fortune as an anarch, free of the influence of my sire and clan elders. I'm not foolish enough to reveal my name here; no doubt, this text will one night find its way into the hands of some clever witch. I have no intention of making it easy for them to identify me — blood magic provides far too many unique and lingering means for exacting revenge.

The Camarilla derives its strength from a structure of centuries of tradition fostered by conservative elder Kindred. By hoarding its knowledge and manipulating younger Kindred like pawns, that ivory tower is becoming a prison for all but the most ancient among us. With this work, I hope to expose the foundation of one of the pillars of the organization, Clan Tremere.

Warlock blood magicians are undeniably one of the cords strangling the growth of Kindred society. Their power rests almost entirely in their sorcerous arts. Without their magic, the grayfaces speak with no special authority. For this reason, they closely guard the secrets of Thaumaturgy. For centuries blood magic protected them against the vengeance of Tzimisce, Nosferatu and Gangrel; now it provides them a chokehold on all Kindred. Even within the

confines of the clan, elders provide bits of knowledge like a Pavlovian reward for correct behavior by younger magi.

For too long anarchs have opposed the clan through trite and trivial methods, like the silly "anti-rituals," which supposedly heap scorn on the Warlocks, but instead make the creator look childish and immature.

I've decided to take a more direct route. By exposing the secrets of blood magic, I place the first crack in their obsolete fortress.

M,

Mortal retainers recently found 33 copies of this work in a Chicago warehouse. The warehouse was serving as a "halfway haven" of sorts for transient anarchs. Nicolai managed to prevent the works from falling into the hands of the other clans.

The work appears to have been reproduced in a local Kinko's. Unfortunately, according to a receipt also found at the site, 35 copies were made. Therefore, at least two, as well as the original, remain at large. Although the author seems knowledgeable and willing to expose all he knows of our practices, I believe we can contain any damage from this by acting quickly and decisively.

di Zagreb

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THAUMATURGY

Magi have spent centuries delving into the mysteries of Thaumaturgy. Even in the modern nights, Kindred blood magicians devote vast amounts of time and resources to researching ancient texts and creating new sorceries. Since the Discipline was developed relatively recently in Kindred terms, this obsession may seem odd to an outsider. However, near-blinding ambition and survival motivated the members of Clan Tremere, the primary practitioners of Thaumaturgy, from the beginning to master the intricacies of blood magic.

TO SEEK IMMORTALITY

I don't intend to give a full-blown history lesson on the Warlocks, but some knowledge of the clan's past is necessary to understand why Thaumaturgy has developed into its current form.

The legends whispered among neonates are true: Clan Tremere was founded by human mages who voluntarily took on the mantle of the undead. A consuming lust for knowledge and ever-greater power literally devoured the mortal lives of the clan's originators. Unfortunately, such power can be attained only through long and diligent study — far longer, the mages found, than a mortal's lifespan. The founders gained nearly limitless time with which to continue their research, but, ironically, their pursuit of magic led them to lose it. By sacrificing their mortality, they also inadvertently gave up the arcane abilities they so coveted.

Oddly, the explanation for this loss is a blank spot in the education of a Tremere apprentice. Whatever the cause, it wasn't tied to the original ritual of transformation itself. Although the grayfaces are closed-mouthed about it, a few years ago I stumbled across an old account of the Tremere's early nights as vampires. The founders Embraced many members of their former House and all, without exception, lost the ability to practice mortal magics. I suspect much about the nature of magic and the Kindred may be bound up in the reason, giving Warlock elders reason to fear its exposure.

Although the loss of their power stung bitterly, of more immediate concern to the fledgling wizards was the fact they had made a number of powerful enemies during their pursuit of immortality. While they were still seeking the secret of undeath, they conducted experiments involving members of the Tzimisce. Those Kindred, including at least one

elder of that clan, did not survive the research. This act earned the Warlocks the undying enmity of the Fiends. Understandable, really.

The Warlocks, forced by the loss of their original skills, knew they must quickly develop an appreciable edge or be expunged. The former magi adapted an ancient form of mysticism from their mortal grimoires to their new existence. Other clans had already experimented this art, calling it blood magic. It was a form of sorcery drawing on the power inherent in the vital fluid of life — and unlfe.

Clan Tremere believed that, with some effort, its rites could be translated into more familiar Hermetic formulae and retain their efficacy. As evidenced by the clan's continued existence and influence, its founders not only succeeded, they excelled in this endeavor. The early Warlocks codified the rituals and practices, creating what became known as the Discipline of Thaumaturgy.

THE SIEGE MENTALITY

Since its origins, the clan has jealously guarded its arcane secrets; knowledge truly is power where Thaumaturgy is concerned. And, even now, the Warlocks have great need of all the power they can muster.

The clan has made many enemies in its short history, and most Tremere believe the clan is still hunted by some of its ancient foes; wronged Kindred have long memories. The Tzimisce still harbor a great hatred for the Tremere, and the Assamite cannibals, once held at bay by thaumaturgical rituals, have somehow broken the bonds of Tremere sorcery. There is little doubt upon which clan those diablerists are going to focus their revenge. The Warlocks can rely only on Thaumaturgy to ward off and ultimately defeat their foes.

History and the ongoing threat of extinction have necessitated a tradition of research and experimentation among practitioners of Thaumaturgy, but adherents also have other reasons for continuing to advance the practice of blood magic. Thaumaturgy provides its users with extremely versatile — and potent — abilities. Not only do these serve to protect to the wielder, but also to expand his influence in society. Sorcery provides nearly endless avenues for culling favors with other Kindred.

On the political level, knowledge of the Discipline has built Clan Tremere prestige in the Camarilla. The clan's mastery of blood magic has given that organization a tremendous advantage over its enemies, and as a result, the Camarilla helps

defend the Warlocks against their own foes. This protection, in turn, allows the Tremere to devote even more time to study and experimentation, creating a revolving cycle of increasing strength for the clan and Camarilla.

To protect their secrets, I've even heard they've gone so far as to kill all of the Tremere who joined the Sabbat. If genocide is an accepted tactic for them, they've got to be serious.

GEHENNA

While great arcane power has material rewards in and of itself, yet another purpose motivates many students of Thaumaturgy. These magi believe Thaumaturgy may provide a defense for them in the coming Gehenna. They claim the relatively recent development of the Discipline means it is unknown to the Antediluvians — possibly the only such ability available to existing Kindred.

I question the logic of this assumption, since the Tremere only derived it from older forms of blood magic. Perhaps the clan organized and refined the ancient art, but it's doubtful that the practice was truly unknown to the mythical Antediluvians. The Tremere merely modified existing blood magic into a more reliable form. I've seen several ancient texts in chantry libraries that mention pre-Tremere blood magic practitioners — including early Assamite sorcerers. For example, the tome *Nominis Inferni* is actually a translation from a much older Sanskrit text. Prior to Thaumaturgy, blood magic may have been rare, but I think it's typical Warlock arrogance to claim it was completely unknown.

Nonetheless, many elders among the Warlocks hold such confidence to be nearly doctrinal. I fear they are in for a surprise when the Ancients do return....

HERMETIC THAUMATURGY

One of the ways Thaumaturgy differs from the earlier forms of blood magic is in the application of a systematic approach to its practice. The creators of Kindred Thaumaturgy were originally practitioners of Hermetic rituals. The Hermetic tradition takes its name from Hermes Trismegistus, or Hermes the "thrice great," the legendary founder of the practice. Medieval alchemists considered him as the father of alchemical philosophy, and he is mentioned in writings as early as the seventh century — over time, all alchemical philosophy and practice came to be known simply as Hermetic magic.

Hermetic practice combined the art of ancient mysticism with the analytical approach of a scientist. It

proved the power of magic through reason and logic. Hermeticism pursued mastery over the mundane through application of the will. According to its teachings, all natural elements (gold, lead, water, etc.) and phenomenon (fire, life itself, etc.) were interrelated, and certain ones possessed traits that could be exploited by a Hermetic magician through proper preparation or ritual. A skilled and knowledgeable practitioner, Hermetics claimed, could use these traits and relationships to impose his desires on reality.

Contrary to popular belief, Hermetic alchemy is not concerned solely with the conversion of lead to gold. The magicians merely considered gold as the finest of all metals, and the transmutation of any substance into gold merely represented a mastery of the Hermetic art. Because alchemists claimed the philosophical goal of Hermeticism was the pursuit of a pure spirit or soul, they professed the quest for gold — the purest metal — was merely allegorical.

Yeah, right, whatever. In reality, those Hermetic magicians were no more spiritually pure than any other. What set them apart from the charlatans and hedge magicians of the time was their understanding of the principles behind the workings of the arcane.

After attaining newfound immortality, the Tremere applied the systematic approach of Hermetic analysis to their new condition. As I've mentioned before, the condition of unlife somehow blocked their former access to mortal magics. However, through inquiry and trial, the Warlocks learned that blood magic, an ancient and feared art even among Kindred, would allow them to shape the power inherent in their own vitae and thus regain their lost power. Of course, a more philosophical person might question whether taking a lien against one's soul in exchange for immortality is such a good deal.

BLOOD MAGIC

I have no doubt many mortal religions and societies have practiced blood magic in some form or another throughout the ages. Evidence of halting and failed attempts is found in cultures ranging from Babylon to ancient Chinese alchemy to the Aztecs in Central America. Some of these enjoyed limited success, but none were very truly reliable.

Blood magicians seek to draw upon the inherent potency of the fluid known as vitae — the mystical essence of blood. What most mortals fail to realize is that blood in and of itself holds no power. In its purest form, blood magic is actually drawing on the

power of life itself; blood is nothing more than a conduit. Mere blood sacrifices cannot draw forth the life-energy contained within; that feat is quite possibly beyond the practical ability of mortal magicians. On rare occasions, a mortal practitioner may have succeeded in doing so, but such instances are only flukes and almost never reproducible.

Kindred, on the other hand, through their very nature feed on this power. The Embrace imbues the vitae with mystic energy. Kindred draw upon this energy to maintain their existence. This same vitae that makes it possible for us to suspend death opens the door to blood magic. Any Kindred with the proper knowledge and desire can practice blood magic; the Tremere have no special exclusive capacity for Thaumaturgy. The Warlocks' miserliness with their secrets holds back the entire race of Kindred from achieving its full potential, however.

Records on blood magic prior to the rise of the Tremere are sketchy and unreliable at best, but it is interesting to note that the Warlocks weren't the first to realize the arcane potential of vitae. The Assamites, the Tzimisce and a few other clans all professed to practice some form of the art. But, lacking the reasoned and codified approach of Hermeticism, blood magic had over a millennium of random tinkering and extraneous ritual tied with it. Many elements of the art were nothing more than gruesome showmanship designed to impress mortals or ignorant Kindred. Accounts of chalices filled with the blood of virgins or carving the heart from a living victim pepper those early histories; good theater, perhaps, but totally unnecessary as far as blood magic is concerned.

The Tremere fused blood magic with Hermetic practice, trimming both traditions to their bare essentials. To the Tremere, Hermetic Thaumaturgy is nothing more than a tool — no more or less spiritual than any other Kindred Discipline. The Warlocks stripped all references to religion and vestiges of frivolous exhibition. You don't usually find hours of liturgies, beseeching prayers or altars in Tremere rituals. If a procedure doesn't serve a definite thaumaturgical purpose, it's commonly excised from the tradition.

Note that this isn't always the case — as I'll talk about later, some people attach mechanical meaning to nontraditional trappings of blood magic. I know of at least one Catholic priest who depends largely on the Church's ritual to conduct his "miracles." Whatever floats your boat, father — I'm talking about the ruck and run of the clan in this little treatise.

"TRUE MAGIC" VS. THAUMATURGY

Tremere often refer to themselves as "magi"; the singular form of this word is "magus." They use the term "mage" — plural "mages" — for mortal practitioners of the arcane. Although both Kindred Thaumaturgy and mortal arcane practices have certain roots in medieval alchemical science, the Warlocks have good reason to make a distinction between the two — their differences run as deeply as those between Kindred and kine.

Mages practice a form of magic that differs from the blood rites of Thaumaturgy. Unfortunately, because clan elders long ago determined it was forever denied to Kindred magi, Tremere chantries no longer hold much information on mortal magic — or at least so the grayfaces claim. I can't imagine those survivors of ancient purges not keeping a close watch on any potential foes. What records are available indicate mages rely on some outside element to work their sorceries.

Also, mages seem reluctant to exert much of their power overtly, fearing some form of undefined effect that balances their manipulations of reality. I've never been able to determine from the limited texts I've had the opportunity to peruse what causes these effects. It does seem to have nearly universally unpleasant results — that is, I suppose, if you define old scars gouging blood or joints suddenly bending in the wrong direction as "unpleasant."

While Thaumaturgy traces its roots to a mortal Hermetic tradition, the magic practiced by Kindred is worlds removed from that of their former peers. The blood magic of Thaumaturgy comes from within the magus; he does not rely on any outside source to impose his will upon the world. Only his own determination and puissance limit a blood magus' power.

Nor is the thaumaturge subject to the strictures of reality in working his magic; no blood magician has ever felt the effects of the mage's mythical and nebulous bane. Why this is so none of my masters ever explained. I think it has to do with the fact that mages draw upon some outside source for their power while we Kindred rely only on our own vitae, but don't quote me on that. One school of thought posits that vampires have long been associated with magic, while mortal sorcerers have always been shunned by their peers. This sort of "consensual acceptance" smacks of artificiality to me, however — legend made fact by mere belief would imply that innumerable "other" creatures and magics are out there, and that one could literally cross the street into another world. Such metaphysics are best left unpondered.

Magi believe most of the mage's limitations spring from her own mortality. Regardless of her aptitude or training, her existence is like a mayfly's when compared to a Kindred magus; she simply does not have the time to learn her art and hone her skills to the level a magus can. Those mortal restrictions drove Tremere himself to seek the gift of immortality. Also, a magus has the potency of vitae to call upon — something no mage can reliably tap — allowing him to draw his power entirely from within.

On the whole, thaumaturges view mages as practitioners of a less refined art than their own. However, no blood magus denies the power a mage can wield when pressed. The nature of non-Hermetic, mortal magic allows a mage to call upon terrible forces at her whim. She may pay a terrible price for her imperfect art later, but that is little consolation to those who suffer her sending's immediate effects!

THE PRACTICE OF THAUMATURGY: PATHS AND RITUALS

Thaumaturgy is the most versatile of all Kindred Disciplines. Through its practice, the Tremere teach that they can duplicate or surpass nearly any other vitae-enhanced ability. Most clan elders claim that the thaumaturge's skill is the only thing that restricts the potential of blood magic. They believe that the possibilities of the tradition are boundless to the true initiate.

Unlike most other Kindred Disciplines, Thaumaturgy has diverged along two lines, rituals and paths. Many non-Tremere find the dual nature of Thaumaturgy perplexing and don't understand why the Warlocks chose to pursue two separate aspects to the same Discipline rather than focus their efforts on one. It would seem, at least to a non-initiate, thaumaturges would be best served by abandoning the lengthy and complex rituals of the past and focusing on the quicker effects of the paths. Yet, the clan still continues to place equal emphasis on each method.

The truth is both rituals and paths have their own individual strengths and weaknesses. Were Thaumaturgy to be limited to only one of the two, the Discipline would not be nearly as versatile as it is. Focus on a single aspect might enhance its effectiveness, but the loss in universality would more than offset that minor gain.

PATHS: THE POWER OF THE WILL

The paths are the purest forms of blood magic. Simply put, they are the power of vitae channeled by the knowledge and will of the magus, allowing her to instantly affect reality. Such is the case with any Discipline. Unlike complex Hermetic rituals, the effects of paths are available to a magus at any time, and require almost no preparation (aside from learning them as one does with any skill) and no unique ingredients. Additionally, they have immediate effects and virtually endless variety. On the surface, the paths appear the more powerful of the two aspects of Thaumaturgy.

Because the ritualistic elements are removed, it is easy for the uninitiated to mistake the effects of a path for an innate Kindred ability. The strength and versatility of the paths leads many magi to theorize Thaumaturgy represents the ultimate potential inherent in Kindred vitae. They also claim other Kindred Disciplines are actually nothing but pale shadows of Thaumaturgy, little more than specialized, stillborn paths that the other clans have developed over several millennia of study and practice.

I should mention that the major proponents of this view tend to be younger Warlocks barely elevated from apprentice status.

Tremere elders point out that while paths are capable of reproducing to some degree the effects of other Disciplines, the ends should not be used to compare the means. For example, they say, fire, electricity and acid all are capable of inflicting burns, but do so in a vastly different manner. Other Disciplines are a function of Kindred nature; in a path, a magus uses vitae as a fuel for blood magic. The difference may seem subtle, but it is very important.

Unlike many other Disciplines, blood magic paths actually consume a portion of vitae to provide power for the magus' will. Whether the magic draws the vitae directly from the magus' body or he actually opens a vein to expose the liquid varies among the Warlocks depending on each practitioner's training. The latter sort are sometimes called "blood-letters" and usually carry a small blade or at least sharpen a thumbnail so they can readily spill their own vitae.

Other Kindred Disciplines are closer to manifestations of the inherent potency contained within Kindred vitae. Only occasionally do they actually expend any of the vital fluid to be effective. A path, and Thaumaturgy as a whole, is not an innate ability

like the superhuman physical strength, speed or even perception that Kindred may exhibit, but, rather, a set of skills allowing trained magi to draw upon their own immortality to shape their surroundings.

This explains the limitations of paths as well. While other Kindred Disciplines are bound by the owner's generation, even the most thin-blooded childer can learn the highest levels of the paths. Oddly enough, however, I have heard of a few potent rituals that only by the most ancient of the grayfaces have mastered — rites that only thaumaturges of the Seventh Generation or lower can perform. One of my masters suggested the explanation for this peculiarity is actually a restriction of thaumaturgical paths themselves, denying elder magi higher achievement. He further postulated that its cause might be the fact Kindred draw their arcane power from a finite source — themselves. Where other Kindred abilities are the result of immortality, Thaumaturgy only exploits an aspect of it.

I'm quite interested in discovering the identity of the whelp's master. That magus is far too careless in revealing such suppositions.

Among Warlocks, the prevalent view is that the paths are the ultimate refinement of blood magic. They combine pure will and pure power without relying on the constructs of Hermetic ritual. As such, they represent a new road for Kindred to follow, one offering possibilities denied by the static progression of Disciplines, one that may eventually lead to another level of Kindred existence.

In spite of this belief, most experienced magi use paths only to a limited extent. While a path may be developed to create nearly any effect, each one is itself fairly restricted in scope. The Path of Blood, Neptune's Might or even Technomancy are all highly effective within their respective realms, but utterly useless outside of them.

Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, use of a path requires the blood magician to sacrifice a small portion of her vitae. The amount is small in most cases, generally equivalent to the same amount expended to maintain the Kindred's existence a single night. This may seem trivial, but it does impose a quantifiable limit to this sorcerous power. No Kindred, especially a blood magician, can afford to frivolously expend her vitae.

Therefore, the majority of Warlocks employ Hermetic rituals to accomplish most of their arcane tasks, relying on path abilities less frequently.

RITUALS: THE POWER OF THE FORMULA

Hermetic rituals are tedious and time-consuming when compared with other Kindred powers. These archaic rites usually require the caster to obtain obscure items, recite phrases in dead languages and perform complicated movements to be effective. If the thaumaturge neglects to meet a single formulaic stricture, the magic fails and all the effort expended is wasted. Non-initiates often wonder why blood magicians waste time continuing to study these restrictive forms or even go so far as to develop new ones.

Part of the explanation is found in the history of Thaumaturgy. The blood magic ritual was the first aspect of Thaumaturgy developed by Clan Tremere. The original practitioners were accustomed to intricate formulae and complex ritual; Tremere, Goratrix and the other founding members had spent their mortal lives studying these Hermetic applications. It was only natural they would maintain this affinity when they laid the foundation of the Discipline.

As the early Warlocks sought a weapon with which to defend themselves from other hostile Kindred, they delved into previously shunned tomes and writings they had avoided as blasphemous prior to their transformation. They unearthed long-forgotten blood-soaked rites and reworked them according to their own skills. It was during this time that the magi developed the first wards against Kindred and ghouls to protect their sanctuaries; *Flesh of the Fiery Touch* and *Wake with Evening's Freshness* also appear to trace their origins back to those first nights. Using these first rituals, the Warlocks balked the assaults of their foes until they were able to develop other means to exploit the power of vitae.

However, even after the clan began to experiment with the paths, the Warlocks clung to the ancient forms of rituals. Clan Tremere isn't the type to continue a practice merely because "that's how it's always been"; the speed with which they scrapped their own philosophy and combined it with blood magic attests to that. No, the clan retains the practice of ritual magic because, quite simply, it works.

Blood magic rituals require a great deal more time to enact than a path's effect, but generally place less strain on the caster. Only rarely do they require